

# SMOKY

*A cat's velvet paws weave life's pattern for a man and a maid*

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

Illustrated by L. R. BATCHELOR

THE village of Dunder Falls was arranged so that it furnished a spacious setting for Smoky when he chose to make one of his regal marches. A common cat would have slunk nervously across the road, and by devious ways, but when Smoky wanted to go, he walked with deliberate dignity where all men and dogs might see him if they cared to look. The river road widened just before it ran at right angles into the state highway and this broad expanse was the parade ground of Smoky.

It was from the grey-blue of his coat that he had sometime derived his name, no one knew just when. Before Jennie Hathaway died, he had more or less belonged to her, but now he was tacitly the property of the village. She had called him 'kitty,' which was as inappropriate to his massive frame as a name could be. His fur was as richly dark as the low hanging storm clouds of autumn sometimes are, his eyes were lambent with mystery, and upon each paw nature had given him seven toes. Strangers looked twice before they believed that Smoky was real.

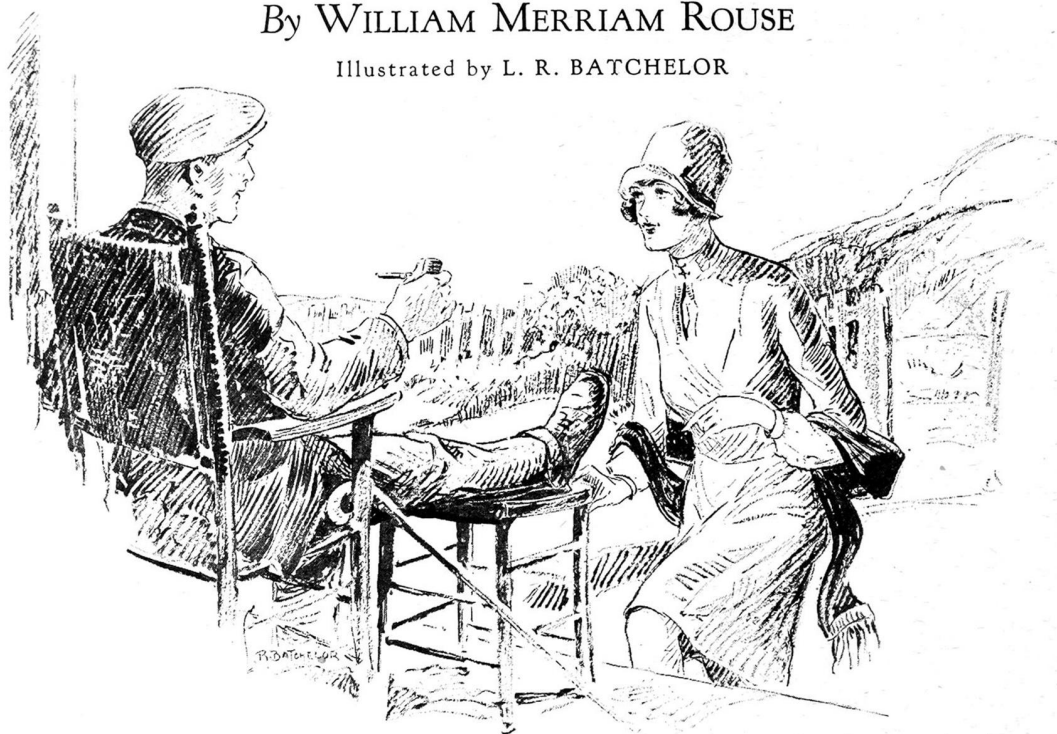
On one of those June paradise-afternoons which come to the mountains, Smoky crossed the street. Long tail straight up, with the end bent over a little to one side, which meant that he was pleased with life, he padded swiftly down from behind the general store in the direction of Albert Orthans' unpainted office. It had been long since any dog had dared to hinder Smoky and he had nothing to think of except his errand. It was his opinion that there were mice in the office of Orthans and occasionally he looked for an opportunity to get in when the long, cold-eyed, cat hater was out.

Joyce Larkin appeared near Orthans' office, on her way to the store from her little house back of the millyard. Smoky forgot the mice and hurried. Joyce half knelt, invitingly; her dark cheeks flushed with pleasure and lips rich in color curved away from the whitest teeth in Dunder Falls.

She reached out with a tantalizing arm, which gleamed white in the sunlight above the tan; a line of beauty against the weathered, curling clapboards of Orthans' place. Joyce's sleeve was a frivolous little thing that left most of her arm bare, and only half concealed her shoulder. That dress she had copied from a picture in one of the ultra-smart New York magazines. Her first copy of the *Metropolis* she had found beside the road, probably lost from some city man's car; then Captain John Fay had subscribed to it for her, and it was now one of the windows from which she looked out upon the world.

Joyce raised a slender hand and brushed away the black curls that were forever shaking themselves over her eyes; she threw back her head with a gesture that revealed a fair, round throat. Then she became conscious, with a chill, that Orthans was looking at her through his window; knew it even before she glimpsed his face. It was his pale gaze that felt like ice upon her bare arms and neck. He would not come out and speak to her, there where people could see him, but he would come down to her house after dark and bother her; or contrive to meet her, out of sight, behind buildings. She hated him, but he was a strong man in Dunder Falls; one who lent money on notes and mortgages and who took to himself houses and farms.

Out of stubborn bravery, she waited there for Smoky. Noiseless feet and eyes filled with deep lights. Smoky's were not the flat yellow eyes of stupid, ordinary cats. He stopped and considered the face of Joyce with benevolence



*"It's a nice day . . . for a walk," she said, deep color filling her cheeks.*

and pleasure; it was as though he said that here was a human being of whom he thoroughly approved and who, according to cat ideas, was not only likable but markedly worthy of distinction above other humans.

"Ur-r-r-rp! Urp!" With an enormous short purr he rose effortlessly to her knee. She swayed under his weight stroking him back from whiskers to waving tail.

"My goodness, Smoky! You're growing big and heavy! And just as nice as you are big!"

Joyce put the cat down, after a moment, and continued on her way to the store; with Smoky running ahead and coming back in little excursions, like a dog. She saw Captain Fay, the veteran, sitting on the shaded porch of his tiny house with his wounded leg stretched out over a stool. She waved; and he swung his cane and brought it up to a firm, pointed chin in salute. Joyce had been just emerging from little girlhood when he came back in '19, and people made such a fuss over him. They had forgotten all that now, they complained because he drew money from the government. Joyce had not forgotten; she still looked upon him with the same awe, more than a little mixed with some other curious emotion. Captain John Fay, with the strange look in his eyes, and shoulders held as no other man in Dunder Falls held them!

JOYCE saw Miss Abbie Gramon going into the house of Tom Gaylord, proprietor of the general store. This was the day when the ladies' sewing circle met with Mrs. Gaylord and the clear brown eyes of Joyce narrowed as she looked at the house, with its rustic porch chairs and air of village opulence. Of all the middle-aged matrons and spinsters meeting there to-day, the only one who spoke to her with a smile was Esther Gaylord, Tom's wife.

Joyce wondered, as she went into the store, whether they were not talking of her now because she had crossed their range of vision, a vision which missed little. Yes, and because she had waved from the middle of the road to John Fay. That would be bold in the eyes of certain of the ladies; and in the eyes of some, bad. She threw back her head with that gesture of defiance which it was hers so often to make; the gesture that flung her short hair like a banner and lifted her chin to cleave a way through the world.

They were, indeed, talking about her over there in the stiff Gaylord parlor; a room furnished in shiny oak and imitation leather, with linoleum of a geometrical pattern upon the floor. Mrs. Logan Todd, a double-chinned

woman, with a mole from which three small whiskers grew, had been looking out of the window when Joyce stopped at the corner of Orthans' office. She had leaned forward in her chair, with bosom of plum-colored satin heaving.

"There's that Larkin girl! Look at her! Stoppin' right by Al Orthans' office and makin' believe it's that big cat, Smoky, she's tryin' to git the 'tention off!"

Mrs. Emory Nugent, president of the circle, was long and bony, with hungry, smouldering eyes under heavy brows. She rose and stalked across the room as the others gave ear to Mrs. Todd; and peered forth. When she went back to her chair, her mouth had become a thinner, more lipless line; her face was pale.

"Ladies," she said, "something's got to be done about that girl! She's a disgrace to this community!"

"You can't expect nothing of her kind!" sniffed Abbie Gramon. "They say her mother was a circus woman, or something like that, and everybody knows her father wound up working in the sawmill, even if he was old Judge Larkin's grandson!"

"She's good in sickness," said small and mild Esther Gaylord, "and clever dressmaking."

"You can't see no evil, Mis' Gaylord!" Abbie Gramon paused to bite off a thread with her prim false teeth. "I've seen her stop to talk to a whole store steps full of river drivers! Good lands!"

"Them short skirts of hers!" Mrs. Nellie Sibley had a way of looking down her long nose which hinted unspeakable things. "But I 'spose John Fay likes 'em!"

"Fay!" snorted Mrs. Todd. "Lives on us taxpayers' money jest because he got his leg hurt in the war! He'd ought to be made to learn shoemakin', or something!"

"It's the girl we want taken care of!" The heavy voice of Mrs. Nugent swept aside everything but the thought that filled her brooding eyes.

"Guess she's got even Al Orthans . . . stirred up!" Mrs. Sibley threw a sidelong glance at the president. "Takes a good one to do that!"

"The minister ought to do something!" exclaimed Mrs. Todd.

"He's a last resort," said Mrs. Nugent, grimly. "Esther, your husband is justice of the peace!"

"I told him how you ladies . . . felt," said Mrs. Gaylord, flushing. "He said he wouldn't do anything unless somebody brought a charge against her, and proved it!"

"Guess they could prove enough!" snapped Miss Gramon. "She goes trampin' all over the country with John Fay limpin' alongside of her!"

"It's time us women took hold of things!" said Mrs. Nugent, in a hoarse, smothered voice. An unnatural color had come to her pale cheeks and her eyes were glowing with dark fire as she rose and put aside the unlovely cotton garment upon which she had not taken a dozen stitches during the afternoon.

"You're the one to do it!" Mrs. Todd told her, vigorously.

"Very well! I'm going home now to draw up a petition to the county supervisor! We'll get rid of her! You'll all sign it and that'll be pressure enough to make the Rev. Arthur Currier sign, whether he wants to or not! He may be soft hearted but he knows where his bread and butter comes from! And with his name, the supervisor will have to do something! He'll think of next election, maybe!"

There was a little burst of approbation from the room, and the quirk smile of Nellie Sibley broadened. Mrs.

Nugent left on the crest of the wave of her triumph; but, as she stepped out of the house, her glance went diagonally across the village to the office of Albert Orthans. Her lips moved, but no words came, for she was too cautious to speak even to the empty air her thoughts. "You wouldn't marry me, Albert, but you'd take up with that hussy!"

Her gaze clung to the small building as she moved slowly along the board sidewalk until she saw Smoky sitting, imperturbable, upon a fence post. His eyes seemed to be penetrating to her soul. She shuddered, and quickened her pace; but when she looked back, at the end of a dozen yards, Smoky was following her with long, slinking steps.

"Emory!" cried Mrs. Nugent, as she flung herself into her own house. A little, touseled man came trotting from the kitchen, wiping his hands. "Drive that miserable cat away! You pet him, and you know how nervous he makes me! I want you to kill him! He followed Jennie Hathaway around . . . and went out and stopped Dr. Blair . . . and they found her dead in the house! Get my heart drops! Quick!"

Emory Nugent spun around, bewildered by two errands at once, and dashed into a bedroom to come running out with a small bottle. His wife had sunk into a chair, chalky white, with laboring breath. He gave her some of the medicine and then hurried out of doors. Smoky was standing a few feet away. He lifted his tail in sign of friendship.

"Ur-r-r-r!"

"Nice kitty!" whispered Nugent, glancing over his shoulder at the windows. "Go 'way, Smoky! She might . . . do something!"

With deliberation, the cat crossed the street and sat down at a fence corner opposite. He gazed over at the house, motionless, inscrutable. Emory Nugent sighed and went indoors.

"I saw you!" gasped his wife, bitterly. "As soon as I feel better, I'll get a paper ready for you to sign, along with some others. To-night, I want you to take it to John Fay! Show it to him, but don't tell him I sent you. He'll rave, and tell the Larkin girl! That's what I want! Maybe she'll get out of town sooner than she has to!"

"Ella! I—"

"Keep quiet!"

THE small shoulders of Emory Nugent sagged, and he went back to the kitchen. John would not blame him; they had had many talks together. Captain John Fay embodied all the things Nugent had missed; the shock of battle, romance. Perhaps it might have been different if he had not married Ella Slater twenty years

ago; Al Orthans had been paying some attention to her and then, suddenly, Emory found himself married to her.

That evening, Emory changed his shirt for one that had a neckband, so he could wear a white collar, and went with dragging feet to the house of John Fay. A folded sheet of foolscap was in his breast pocket, and there was a physical sensation as though it pressed too hard against his chest. Ella had recovered sufficiently to go out and get fifteen or twenty signers.

Captain Fay was in the living room of his cottage when Nugent arrived, and paused for a moment to look through the screen door. How nice it was to be a bachelor! An easy chair, a good lamp to read by, and books and magazines. The broad table was littered with pipes and tobacco and ash trays. Solid comfort!

John Fay looked up under his eyebrows and, as always, he seemed neither pleased nor displeased at sight of a caller. It was not often that his dead-and-alert calm was broken. He tossed a book to the table and Nugent saw from the fluttering leaves that it was poetry.

"Hello!" said Captain Fay, in a voice slightly gruff but tinged with kindness. "Have a chair! What's on your mind to-night, Emory?"

"Except for that leg, what a fine figure of a man," thought Nugent. Close cut hair and clean shaven face. Gray-haired, and too young for it; but that did not matter any more than the lines that cut his face as the seams of the tailor indent good cloth. He had been cut and sewn after a good pattern.

Nugent sat down and rubbed his nose. Always, it took him a moment to get used to the strange eyes of Captain Fay. There was a stir in the shadows behind the tilted shade of the reading lamp and Emory Nugent jumped like a scared rabbit. He grinned foolishly as Joyce Larkin came out into the light and smiled at him.

"Hello, Mr. Nugent!" she said, and sat down upon the stool over which Fay rested his wounded leg. "Captain John was reading to me. Poetry. 'Something lost behind the ranges! Lost and calling to you. Go!'"

She looked at him curiously, with half her smile still lingering. He had never heard the words before but they meant something to him . . . and nothing. There was something lost behind the ranges but he could never go. Ella would not let him.

"I got something to show you, Cap'n." He cleared his throat. "Some of Ella's doings. When you read it you'll see what she's up to."

Fay took the foolscap, scowling at the mention of Mrs. Nugent's name. The smoke came furiously in a cloud from his pipe as he read. Then he laughed, and handed the paper to Joyce.

"Much obliged for letting me know, Emory! The hens are cackling again!"

Joyce threw back her head; and just for an instant her eyes were hurt, her lips quivered. She also laughed, something after the manner of Captain Fay but with a trifle of effort.

"I don't care!"

"Tell your wife . . ." began the Captain. He paused as a faint scratching sound came from the door. "It's Smoky, Joyce!"

THE great gray cat entered the room, with tail high and feet going up and down in the goose-step he used when he was on parade among friends. His rusty, bass purr announced contentment as he leaped lightly to Fay's lap and, after a moment's arch consideration, began to cuff at a letter that lay open upon the table. In his lighter moments Smoky would sometimes condescend to the frivolity of play.

"You was going to say something about Ella?" asked Nugent, anxiously. "I never see her worse than she is about this business. Had another heart attack over it!"

"Tell her, nobody cares, Emory!" shrugged Fay. He drew meditatively at his pipe. "Through some friends I've been able to arrange so that Joyce can go to a school of applied design in New York. It's an entering wedge, and if she pounds hard enough she can drive a way into the world for herself."

"Good!" cried Nugent. His eyes smarted with swift relief, and rejoicing. "You don't know how glad I be, Joyce!"

She danced over to him and patted the thin spot on top of his rumpled head. Shining with youth, and hope, and dreams come true! He had never known the feeling that was in her eyes.

"It's time Joyce left this place!" said Fay, gruffly. "Wish I could!"

The girl turned and looked at him, with a troubled frown. Her lips parted but she did not speak. Nugent, feeling the weight of the silence, got up slowly; always, he hated to go home from this place.

"Good night," said the Captain, "and thanks!"

As the steps of Nugent died away, Captain John Fay looked up into the eyes of Joyce; great, wide eyes, filled with the soft mysteries of velvet night, the gleam of stars, the laughter of summer. He had seen her grow to womanhood and it might be that he would see her again in maturity, after she had mastered life down there in the city. He would be a little older; and nothing more. If they were back now at the beginning of the war, when he was just out of college and about to enter forestry school,

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"I told you not to come here again, Mr. Orthans," she said, in a low voice. "Nor to bother me, ever! You know it won't do you any good."



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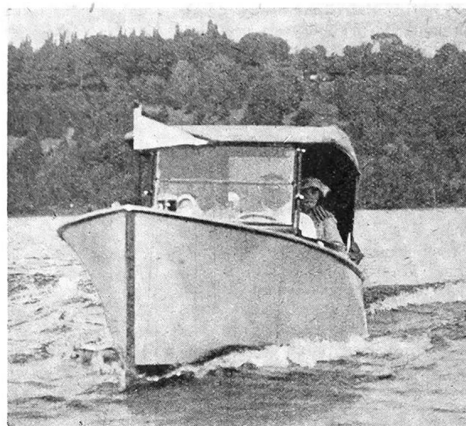
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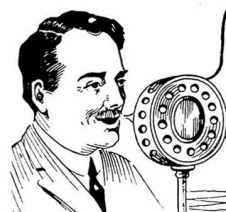
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WHO ARE THEY?



### THE PUZZLE

Twenty-two popular moving picture stars are supposed, recently, to have swam in a race across the English Channel. Their names are printed below. The results of the race were broadcast by Radio Station BWLG, but the operator, to have some fun and keep the thousands of interested listening fans in suspense, announced the names of the first seven to finish jumbled up. For instance, he gave number 5 as "Nan grows o sail" instead of Gloria Swanson, and offered big prizes to those who could correctly name the first seven he announced. In the picture above you see him announcing the names in ridiculous fashion. If you can put the letters of each name back in their right places you will have the names of the first seven whose pictures are shown to the left in the order in which they finished. Find their names and send them in to compete for the big prizes.

**NAMES OF ALL THE MOVIE STARS WHO SWAM IN THE CHANNEL RACE—THE FIRST 7 ARE AMONG THESE—**Alice Joyce, May McAvoy, Lillian Gish, Constance Talmadge, Colleen Moore, Madge Bellamy, Corinne Griffith, Norma Shearer, Seena Owen, May Allison, Gloria Swanson, Norma Talmadge, Bebe Daniels, Clara Bow, Vilma Banky, Pola Negri, Viola Dana, Florence Vidor, Marion Davies, Marie Prevost, Lois Wilson, Mary Brian.

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7. PEARL GO IN

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Money to pay the above prizes in full is on deposit in trust with the Canadian Bank of Commerce, Wallace & Lansdowne Ave., Toronto.

### FOLLOW THESE SIMPLE RULES

1. Write answers in pen and ink on one side of the paper only. Put name and address and name of this paper in upper right hand corner, stating whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss. Put anything else on separate sheet. Don't send fancy, drawn or typewritten entries. 2. Contestants must be 15 years or over. Employees of this company, their friends and relatives are forbidden to enter. 3. Final awards will be made by a committee of 3 Toronto gentlemen having no connection with the firm. Their names will be made known to all contestants. Contestants must agree to abide by their decisions. Prizes will be awarded by points. 300 points, the maximum, will take first prize, 175 points will be awarded for the correct solution to the puzzle. 10 points each for general neatness, appearance, spelling, punctuation and handwriting of entry, and 75 for fulfilling the conditions of contest. Contest closes June 30th, 1927. Entries should be forwarded promptly. \$100 extra prize for promptness will be given.

The Company conducting the contest is an old established, reliable and responsible Company.

References: Any Bank or Mercantile Agency.

he turned and lowered the line through the hole.

The taste of food had made the old char bold. She was cruising impatiently near the bottom and when she saw the bait sinking she rose and took it, turned and angled swiftly downward. The line was slack and she was over the log before it came taut. A jerk tore hook and bait from her mouth and as they slid over the side of the sunken log the hook fastened itself into the tenacious wood. A pause—a stronger tug—the line parted.

ABOVE were broken sounds of movement, then the crunch of snowshoes moved off, became fainter, were lost in silence. The old char came warily back to strip the harmless hook. In years gone by she had brought disaster to many living things that came to Alder Creek. But soon there would be no more danger at the creek mouth, for the two scraps of meat could not sustain her long.

Down the lake a black spot moved, trudging unsteadily toward the blizzard which would swoop when darkness came.

## S M O K Y

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everything would be different. A couple of machine gun bullets had done him in for forestry, and pretty nearly everything else. He had to live here in the house that had belonged to his parents; here in Dunder Falls where he could make a go of it on his small compensation.

"Come on!" he growled, lifting down his stiff leg. "I'm going to take you home!"

"Don't you growl at me!" she laughed. "Or I'll take your cane away from you! And you'll have to lean on me! And you'll be sorry you growled!"

He grinned, and swung himself erect with a deftness born of long practice. Until he took a step it would not be apparent that there was anything the matter with his leg; for a moment he stood at attention.

"A soldier!" whispered Joyce, hands clasped and eyes shining.

"I was!" grimly. "It looks as though I never would be again!"

"You . . . you'd go, again"

"We say we wouldn't but we would!" He laughed. "To the colors? Of course!"

He led the way and held the door open for her, leaning heavily upon his stick. He was trying to teach her to expect that doors would be held open; no other man she knew did it.

Fay walked awkwardly, but it was not hard for him; and the surgeons had said that it might just possibly be good for his knee. Down across the broad river road, with Joyce brushing his coat sleeve. The lights in the store were out, and in most of the houses, but in the office of Albert Orthans candles burned.

The gentle summer night hid the village so that they seemed to be alone under the myriad stars. Joyce walked very close. Fay swung his elbow out as he used his stick, in order to push her away. Little fool! Everything was waiting for her in New York; she must go ready to forget Dunder Falls and everyone in it.

"S-s-stop poking me!" she blurted suddenly. Anybody'd think you didn't want me to come near you." "I don't," grunted Fay. "Go to bed and make plans about New York!"

"I won't!" she snapped. "I'll go to sleep! That's all I care about New York or . . . or . . . y-you, either! There!"

"Hah!" laughed Captain Fay. "I wish I could see your face now! You're mighty pretty when you have a temper!"

Silence, and then choking sounds beside him. Inwardly, he groaned. The small, suppressed sobs tore him like shrapnel. He reached out and patted her shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Joyce!" he whispered. "I'm grouchy, I guess. Done for! But I

don't mean to take it out on you, or anybody."

"Oh!" she cried softly, in a pain wrung voice. "Oh . . . no! Nobody is ever done for!"

He shrugged in the darkness, and they came to her house in silence. Captain Fay waited until he saw her standing by the lamp with a lighted match in her hand. Then he turned and swung up toward his own empty home. Good step, bad step! Good step, bad step!

She heard the sound of his uneven departure. Gone! She had wanted him to stay and comfort her a little with his presence, if not with words. Something was wrong with her. She did not know exactly what it was, and not at all what to do about it. It had seemed as though the desire of her heart was a chance to get out into that world where people were like those in *The Metropolis*; but now that she would be gone in a week or so sadness was like a dull ache through and through her.

The lamp burned up brightly. The night was warm but Joyce felt a little touch of chill as she threw her head back and roused herself from her moment of introspection. She wondered; and then, as the hinges of the door creaked faintly, she knew. Albert Orthans stepped into the room, letting the door shut quietly behind him.

A TALL man, he would have been an impressive figure if he had not carried his body slightly inclined forward as though he were forever looking for something he could not find. He would even have been good looking if it had not been for his eyes. They were pale bluish-green, like ice. The thick, gray hair, which he did not have cut often enough, made him look wintry. He gave the feeling of one of those winter days when the sun is hidden and the cold goes through stout wool and flesh to the very marrow of the bones.

"Good evening, Joyce," he said, putting his hat in one chair and sitting down in another without invitation. A hat of good texture, like his clothing; but, like the clothing, uncared for. His long legs seemed to fill the room. Joyce recovered from her first shock of surprise; she began to grow angry, and fearful. Never, before, had he been so self-assured.

"I told you not to come here again, Mr. Orthans," she said, in a low voice. "Nor to bother me, ever! You know it won't do you any good!"

"I know you think so," he replied, calmly. His voice was like the moving of the spring ice pack in the Dunder River; filled with implacable power, menacingly low. "You think you are going to New York to study something or other."

"Who told you?" she gasped.

"John Fay borrowed the money from me to make it possible!"

"Oh!" Her voice died upon the exclamation. Then the Captain's long story about a scholarship, and all, had been fiction for her sake. Thoughts swept her mind bewilderingly; she knew what sacrifice he must have made.

"Didn't you know he got the money from me?"

"I thought it was free . . . a scholarship. Oh, I don't see why he had to tell you!"

"It has never entered Fay's mind that I have any interest in you. He is one of those idiots who see nothing, hear nothing, but their own sentimentality!"

"I won't take it!" she murmured, more to herself than to Orthans. "No, I won't go that way!"

"You won't go . . . now!" he told her; and for the moment she was so angry that she missed something lurking back of his words.

"What do you care!" she blazed. "If Captain Fay knew how you've bothered me, he'd kill you! Do you know that? Men who've been through what he has got . . . different! Some things they don't care about and some . . . they care a lot about!"

"Soldiers!" shrugged Orthans, coldly.

"They make a great fuss about themselves!"

"They fought for you!" At this moment, and for the first time, Joyce actively hated the man. Heretofore, she had merely wanted to have him removed from her, as something noxious.

"Wise men make wars and fools fight them," said Albert Orthans. "But that has nothing to do with us. 'You are going to stay here and . . . be more friendly or . . . Fay will have trouble!'"

"What do you mean?" she cried, backing away from the look in his eyes.

"When he was commissioned he mortgaged his house to me to get money for his uniforms and outfit. Now he's raised more money, giving, as additional security his books and furniture. I suppose he thought he could keep up the interest out of his government money, and so he could. But I repeat that soldiers are fools! He signed the paper I had drawn for him without more than glancing at it. It constitutes a deed, Joyce, and I can sell him out any day. You don't have to believe me, girl! Come to my office and I'll show it to you!"

"Oh . . . God!" Joyce sank to a chair; her hands lay limp upon her knees, while she stared blankly at Orthans. She saw herself persecuted, shamed, by Mrs. Nugent; beaten out of her previous chance to make something of herself. Harried by Orthans. But, the Captain must not suffer. "He can give the money back to you, Mr. Orthans! I won't take it!"

"I've made a good trade," said Orthans, with a dry chuckle. "I would not resell to him at the price I paid. No, Joyce, I'm afraid Fay will have to take the cash he got for you and move . . . unless . . ."

"Oh, go away from me!" cried Joyce, wringing her hands. "Go! I'll be crazy if you sit there any longer! I don't want to look at you! Wait! To-morrow . . . I don't know what I'll do! The Captain . . . let me think! You . . ."

Her incoherence ceased, because, for the moment, her mind had gone numb. Orthans rose and took up his hat. Something in the nature of a smile pulled his mouth a little to one side.

"Maybe you'll be able to go to New York . . . later on, Joyce."

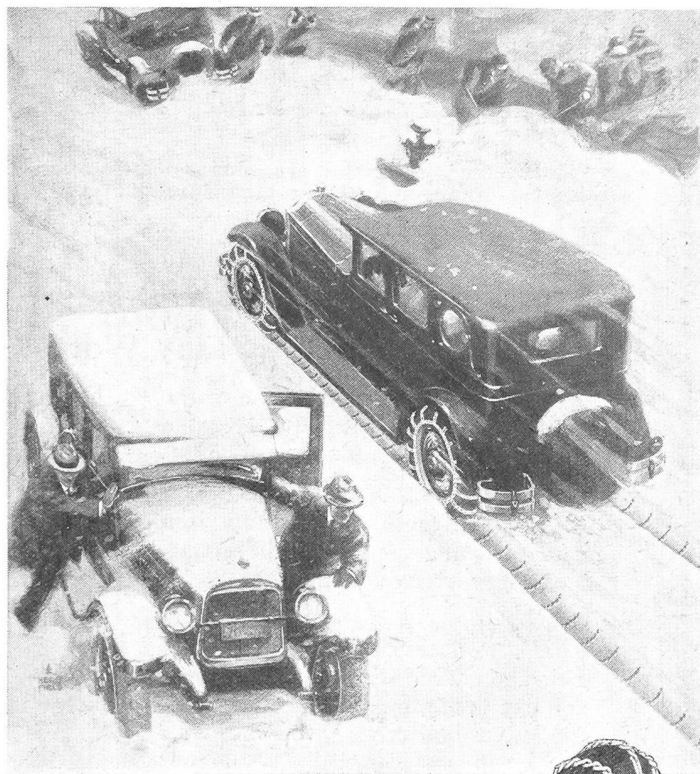
HE WAS gone, and she was alone with her bitter thoughts. For long minutes, she stood staring at the door, dazed. At length she roused herself and went about the business of getting ready for the night with the step of a tired middle-aged woman. The youth in her was beaten down, sickened. All her life, Dunder Falls had tried to crush her because she was different; because she had chosen rather to follow the thundering glory of the spring log drive than to sit quietly and primly at home, crocheting, with windows closed against the April.

She thought wildly of trying to steal the ruinous paper Captain Fay had signed. She knew what it meant to him; all the difference between comfortable poverty, and misery. With room rent and board to pay, he would have no books, no magazines, no good tobacco. Tasteless fare and privacy, only, within four close walls. He must not be allowed to suffer like that!

To the colors! There was something in him that made him willing to go to war again if they needed him. Was it in her? What did she matter? What had she ever done? She had dreamed of coming back to Dunder Falls some day like one of those pictured girls in *The Metropolis*; perhaps Captain Fay would have liked her better, then. She gave this up; it seemed that everything must be given up.

Morning ended the long night at last; and brought to her a little of that something which morning always brings to the troubled spirit. Courage, and a little of eternal hope. She dressed carefully, making herself as pretty as she could, and went up toward the house of John Fay

Continued on page 51



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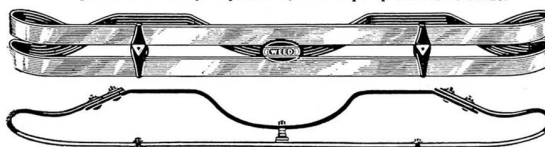
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styles for all makes  
of cars. Illustration  
shows WEED  
"Sentry 25"  
Bumper



Continued from page 49

without knowing exactly why she was going there. He had always been to her like a beacon on a hilltop.

She had wrapped a black silk scarf that was one of her few treasures, around her neck and thrown the ends over a shoulder. Black scarf, gleaming, black hair, and flimsy, wine-red dress with the good lines which she had by instinct given it in the making. For some reason, which she did not try to name to herself, she wanted Captain John Fay to see her at her best this day.

Fay was on the porch, reading yesterday's newspaper. He scowled at her, the more fiercely because she was very beautiful this morning. A red rose came to torment him. No wonder so many of the village women wanted to annihilate her. He must hurry her out of Dunder Falls and then, perhaps, something of his former dull peace would come back to him.

"What do you want?" he demanded. Then, inwardly, he cursed himself, because of the look in her eyes. All dressed up. To-day meant something to her, evidently, and he had hurt her. If he did not smooth the hurt the memory of it would live with him forever. He smiled, she brightened.

"It's a nice day . . . for a walk!" she said, deep color filling her cheeks.

"Ha!" Captain Fay flung down the paper and reached for his stick. "So that's it? I knew something was up!"

These walks had been their lecture hours; but, she, patently, was in no mood to hear about men, or books, or places to-day. Nor could he endure the role of tutor. June sunlight lay like a caress upon the tender green of the trees. Fay lifted his leg down from the stool and stood up, drawing himself erect. Joyce smiled up at him. To-morrow would be another day. They started up the river road. Good step, bad step! Good step, bad step!

"Oh, look!" cried Joyce. "There's Smoky!"

The cat was waiting for them, blinking, where the wooden sidewalk dwindled to a worn path. He raised his tail and started on ahead, with frequent backward glances.

"He acts like a dog," said Fay. "Early this morning he was in cat character. Came to me for breakfast, caught a mouse in the kitchen, and disappeared again."

"He visits everybody he likes," smiled Joyce. "Let's follow him and go wherever he does! It'll be fun! Dare you?"

"Don't know whether I could make it or not!" laughed the Captain.

"Double-dare you!"

"All right, Miss Daredevil! We'll make you quit, Smoky and I!"

"I'll go anywhere you do! You'll be the one to quit first!"

"Wait and see!"

Smoky was a little disappointing in his decorum. He passed the treeless, barren lawn of the Perkins old maids. It would have been a public scandal for Captain Fay and that Larkin girl to follow the village cat across their dooryard and over the woodpile, for instance. Smoky did not walk the tops of fences, for which Fay was thankful. He kept sedately on.

At last, the cat stopped before an open gate, looked back once, and trotted up the graveled walk in a businesslike fashion. The two humans hesitated.

"Good heavens!" muttered Fay. "He's going to the parsonage!"

Joyce laughed, and the Captain joined her. The idea of a call from them, together, upon the Rev. Arthur Currier was rather ludicrous. Joyce dug her fingers into his arm.

"Double-dare!" she whispered.

"All right, young lady!" exclaimed Fay, pivoting upon his cane and starting up the walk. "I'd forgotten that this was one of Smoky's pet homes. Come on!"

CAPTAIN FAY had no idea what errand he was going to make as they followed Smoky on to the porch. There was no time to think, for the door opened,

and in the doorway stood the minister himself, smiling upon them. A kindly, dignified old man, with a face mellowed by time. Years before, he had tutored Fay in Latin. The same ruffled hair, a little whiter; a black coat worn down to the same shininess. Smoky disappeared into the house.

"Well, children!" exclaimed the Reverend Currier. Slowly, a twinkle came into his eyes. He beamed upon them. "Come right in! I'm glad to see you here . . . like this . . . together! Take the young lady into the parlor, John, and I'll be right with you!"

Automatically, John Fay went into the parlor. The same room he remembered; the crayon portrait of the son that had died, the beaded lambrequin along the mantel, the two patent rockers placed squarely in front of the windows, facing each other.

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed Joyce. "Oh, my! Oh, my!"

"What's the matter?" asked Fay. "It's embarrassing, I know, but we'll think of something, or explain the joke, and get out!"

Mr. Currier came back into the room, herding his wife and a broad and giggling maid before him. Mrs. Currier looked over her glasses and recognized Fay; for a moment he thought she was going to kiss him as she shook both his hands. And she did touch the cheek of Joyce lightly.

"What a pretty, pretty girl!" she cried. Two tears ran down her faded cheeks. "I've seen her, John, but I never spoke to her before. Such a good, dear face! I'm so glad, my boy!"

"If you young folks are ready . . ." began the minister, with a rising inflection. He held an open book in his hand. Then, for the first time, Captain John Fay understood what was about to happen. Mentally, he clutched, and gasped, and struggled, like a man flung into the swift river. Heavens! These two good old simpletons thought Joyce and he had come to get married. Of course! For what else would two such village n'er-do-wells come to the parsonage? He must stop it!

"Mr. Currier—" he began, when Joyce took hold of his arm with fingers which actually hurt. She was pulling his head down close to her crimson face while the others moved discretely away.

"Go through with it!" she whispered. "Oh, please! It will save you from something terrible that you don't know about! It just came to me that this would save you! I'll tell you afterward! Please do it! It will save me, too! You don't have to stay married to me!"

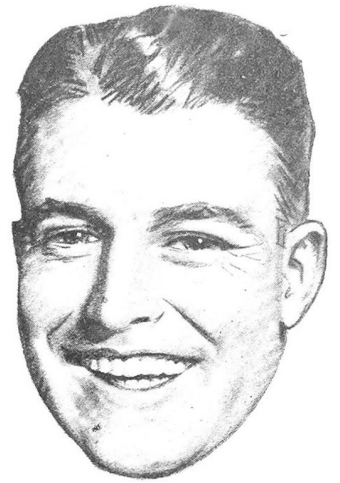
The last words, and in that tone, were what swept John Fay along. For the first time he realized that she still needed him, and was going to need him. The terrible thing of which she babbled impressed him not at all but the plain evidence that he could help her a little longer turned his mind. After all, why not marry her? He could protect her. He could let her go again. Did it matter what more pain his heart knew? To himself he had long since become less than the dust?

"All right now, Mr. Currier!" he laughed, lightly. "Joyce had a last moment thought."

He found himself saying words mechanically. Then, there was more hand-shaking and they were out of the house; and Joyce was turning around and around upon her finger the thick wedding ring that Mrs. Currier had lent her for the day. Her cheeks burned; she did not look up at him until they were out of the sight and sound of houses. Then she stopped and in a swift torrent of words poured forth the story of Orthans.

"Now we can both take that money and go," she finished. "It came to me, the idea, when Mr. Currier opened his book. I'll get a job in the city right off instead of going to school, so you can live in the country somewhere and have things! It will be paying you back! I knew you'd

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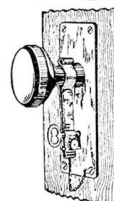
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just get yourself in trouble with Mrs. Nugent or Orthans! Now they can't do anything, and—"

"Except take everything I own!" said Fay, laughing with a funny feeling in his throat. "But I don't care!"

"And . . . and you don't have to live with me! I didn't mean to . . . you don't think . . . what I did was all right, wasn't it, Captain John?"

"Dammit!" Captain Fay suddenly dug both sets of knuckles into his eyes. "Call me John, you little scamp! Didn't we get married just now?"

THAT night, at dusk, Smoky felt particularly well. He had had an interesting day, which had started with two breakfasts; one with Captain Fay and a second at the home of the Rev. Arthur Currier. Then, he had gone to look for a deer mouse which he suspected of having a family in a fence corner opposite the house where the Nugents lived; the people who half liked him and half hated him. During his vigil, he had seen the half that liked him come out and run with ungainly leaps down the street. Then he had come back with Dr. Blair, of whom Smoky was exceedingly suspicious, and they were both running. Some women had hurried in from other houses. Later in the day, a stranger had driven up and hung a knot of black ribbons with trailing ends beside the door. Much interesting excitement; but it was well for a cat to remain aloof on the other side of the road.

Now, Smoky strolled toward Albert Orthans' office. Orthans came out and the cat moved out of his way, although with dignity. He hated the man. He looked up and saw a faint light coming from an open window. Orthans was going slowly through the darkness down toward the house where Joyce Larkin lived. This would be a good time to look for mice in the Orthans office.

Smoky leaped up to the window sill. Yes, a distinct smell of mice. A candle had been left upon a table covered with papers; but in a candlestick with a broad bottom, where it could burn down and out with no harm. Smoky would have preferred not to have the light for hunting, but as a cat he had learned to make the best of everything. He dropped into the room and prowled across the floor.

It was here that one of his moods of playfulness came upon him. An end of tape hung down from the table. He sat up and cuffed mightily at it. It swung. He cuffed again, and the nail of one of his seven toes caught. Smoky leaped backward, pulling hard and with all his weight. There was a thump and a crash and he bounded back to the window-sill with a pounding heart.

All was well, so far as he was concerned. Only a heap of papers pulled to the floor. Things like that happened often when one was afkitten, but they were hard on the nerves of a mature and dignified cat. The yellow spot of light from the candle which was now on the floor, had wavered almost out. Now, Smoky saw it become a streak, shooting up. It grew higher and broader. Fire hurt. This was no place for a cat. Smoky dropped to the ground outside and started across the road for a visit to Captain Fay. He had lost interest here and it might not be too late for supper with the Captain, before the night's hunting.

On the porch sat Captain John Fay, and upon a cushion beside his chair sat Joyce. Her head lay back upon his good knee and both her hands held one of his against her cheek.

"Something lost behind the ranges," she whispered into the darkness. "We've found it, John!"

"Yes, Joyce! To-day!"

They paid no attention to a cat. Nor to anything but themselves. Not even to the bright red glow in the windows of Albert Orthans' office. Smoky sat down and washed his face. He might as well go and get a mouse. Such was life.

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